

PHAA & CAPHIA MEDIA RELEASE



CAPHIA

Council of Academic Public

Health Institutes of Australia

150 professors to fight possible NHMRC funding cuts

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) and the Council of Academic Public Health Institutes of Australia (CAPHIA) have written to the Prime Minister and colleagues to express concern about possible funding cuts to National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) research. The letter from the two leading public health organisations has also been signed by over 150 Professors of Public Health from around the country, who say the proposed cuts come at a time of unprecedented reform including in the primary health care and preventive sector.

“A previous Federal budget saw the abolition of the Public Health Education and Research Program (PHERP) with a major impact on a range of public health programs. Every University has been impacted by the loss of PHERP funding which in turn affects capacity building in the public health workforce. Now, proposed cuts to the NHMRC research funds will have further impact on public health research,” explained Professor Helen Keleher, PHAA President.

“Public health research has struggled to gain funding within NHMRC to a level anywhere near on par with its policy relevance and population impact. It remains especially vulnerable to disproportionate reductions if budget cuts are instituted. Public health research tends to produce long term rather than short term outcomes and is therefore more vulnerable to cutbacks than other forms of research. However, it is also true that many of the great advances in improved health outcomes have come through public health. If we are to improve population health and address health inequities, we must invest in public health research to inform programs and policy,” said Professor Keleher.

“Public health successes in environmental health, communicable disease control, injury prevention and health advancement account for much of the improvement in health and life expectancy over the last 50 years. While more research is still being conducted on these issues, public health is also involved in improving nutrition and physical fitness to deal with the obesity epidemic, as well as alcohol, illicit drugs and gambling policy to reduce harm associated with these activities. These are complex issues in which evidence gaps exist and further research is required to effectively support programs,” said Professor Bennett.

“Public health research informs the development of programs and policies and evaluates their effectiveness. It investigates the social and environmental determinants of health to ensure targeting of programs to get the best outcomes for the least cost. We know that prevention is better than cure, and prevention reduces the burden of illness and disability in our society. Undertaking research into prevention of ill health and promoting good health is a cost effective intervention which saves lives.

“We are urging the Government to reconsider any possible cuts to the NHMRC budget that will surely impact heavily on public health research,” said Professor Bennett.

A full copy of the letter sent by PHAA and CAPHIA to the Prime Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Education and Minister for Health is available on the PHAA website at: www.phaa.net.au .

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